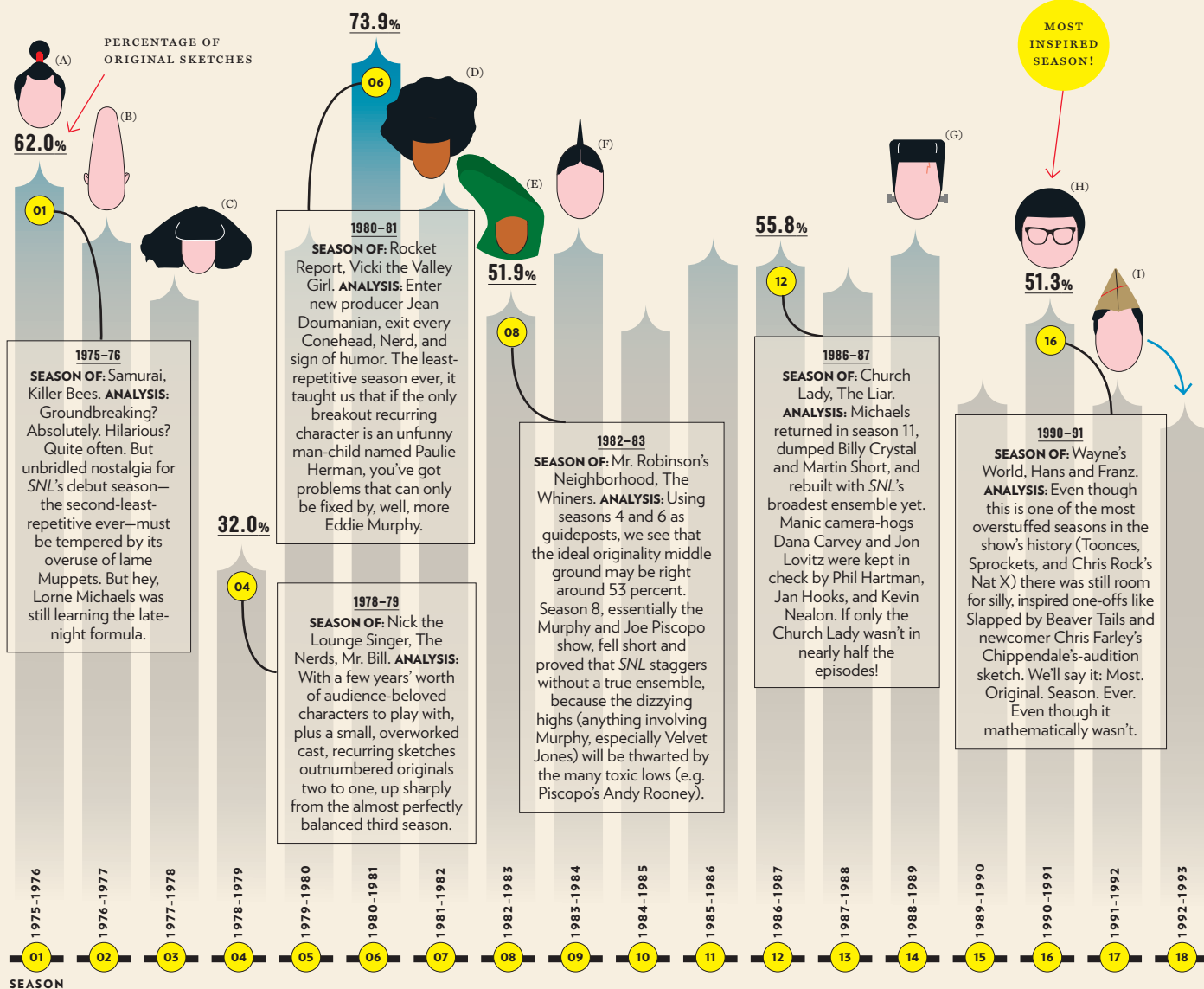


THE CREATIVE LIFE OF 'SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE' WHICH SEASON WAS THE MOST ORIGINAL? AND DOES IT MATTER?

BY JOHN SELLERS

MOST *SNL* viewers have no doubt experienced Repetitive-Sketch Syndrome—that uncanny feeling that you’re watching a character or setup you’ve seen a zillion times before. As each new season unfolds, the sense of déjà vu progresses from being



The Cast Members, and the Frequently Repeated Nonpolitical Characters They Played

ERA: 1975-80 (SEASONS 1-5)

The original cast, led by Gilda Radner, John Belushi, Dan Aykroyd, Jane Curtin, and Garrett Morris. Chevy Chase left in season 2; Bill Murray arrived that season.

- 25 episodes - Emily Litella (Radner)
- 17 - (C) Roseanne Roseannadonna (Radner)
- 16 = (A) Samurai Futaba (Belushi)
- 16 = Father Guido Sarducci (Don Novello)
- 11 = (B) The Coneheads (Aykroyd et al.)

ERA: 1980-85 (SEASONS 6-10)

Joe Piscopo and Eddie Murphy dominated 5-9; Brad Hall, Tim Kazurinsky, and Mary Gross helped. Ten soared with Billy Crystal, Martin Short, Christopher Guest, and Harry Shearer.

- 14 - Dr. Jack Badofsky (Kazurinsky)
- 10 - The Whiners (Piscopo and Robin Duke)
- 9 - (D) Buckwheat (Murphy)
- 8 = (E) Gumby (Murphy)
- 8 = (F) Alfalfa (Gross)

ERA: 1985-95 (SEASONS 11-20)

Jon Lovitz, Nora Dunn, Dana Carvey, Kevin Nealon, Jan Hooks, and Phil Hartman starred in early seasons of the era; then came Mike Myers, Chris Rock, Chris Farley, Adam Sandler, David Spade, Al Franken, Rob Schneider, and Julia Sweeney. Creative peaks and valleys abound.

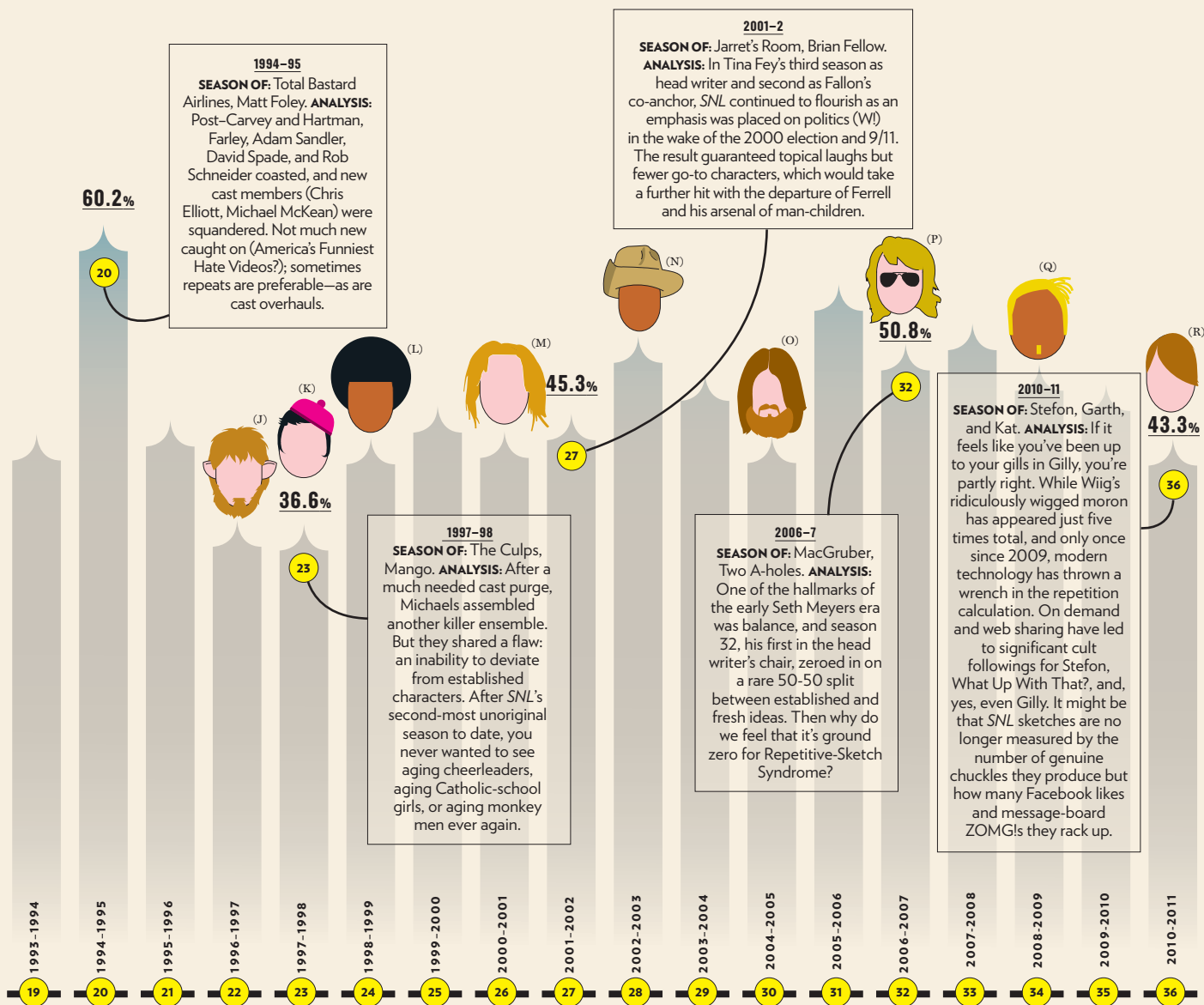
- 20 - Wayne Campbell (Myers)
- 19 - Hans and Franz (Carvey and Nealon)
- 19 - Stuart Smalley (Franken)
- 18 = Pat Stevens (Nora Dunn)
- 18 = Tommy "The Liar" Flanagan (Lovitz)
- 17 - Church Lady (Carvey)
- 13 - Dieter from Sprockets (Myers)
- 13 = (H) It's Pat! (Sweeney)
- 12 = (G) Frankenstein (Hartman)
- 7 = (I) Canteen Boy (Sandler)

shruggingly tolerable to being moderately irksome, until you reach that moment when, after yet another cast member debuts that Barbara Walters impression or tries out that anal-retentive talk-show host, you absolutely must tweet four words: Least. Original. Season. Ever. But

is it really? To help you avoid an annual social-media gaffe, Vulture systematically examined the show's first 36 years—7,798 sketches and 702 Weekend Updates—to calculate precisely which had the highest percentage of repeated sketches, and which had the lowest, and why. Are very

repetitive seasons creative low points? Or might recurring sketches be an indication that the humor machine is working efficiently?

Additional reporting by Matthew Kitchen, Cooper Marshall, Brian Raftery, Alexa Tsoulis-Reay, and Emily Watkins.



ERA: 1995-2002 (SEASONS 21-27)

Will Ferrell became a superstar, while Molly Shannon played a self-proclaimed one (with great frequency). Tim Meadows stuck around and contended for sketch time with the likes of Cheri Oteri, Chris Kattan, Ana Gasteyer, and Jim Breuer. Darrell Hammond did pretty much everything.

- 21 - The Culpes (Ferrell and Gasteyer)
- 15 - (L) Leon "Ladies' Man" Phelps (Meadows)
- 18 - Mary Katherine Gallagher (Shannon)
- 15 - (K) Mango (Kattan)
- 17 - Spartan Cheerleaders (Ferrell and Oteri)
- 10 - (J) Goat Boy (Breuer)
- 9 - Roxbury Guys (Ferrell and Kattan)

ERA: 2002-6 (SEASONS 28-31)

The Tina Fey-and-Jimmy Fallon heyday is also frequently punctuated by Rachel Dratch, Maya Rudolph, Tracy Morgan, Amy Poehler, and Will Forte gags.

- 12 - (N) Brian Fellow (Morgan)
- 12 - The Boston Teens (Fallon and Dratch)
- 12 - (M) Jarret's Room (Fallon and Horatio Sanz)
- 9 - (O) The Falconer (Forte)
- 7 - Debbie Downer (Dratch)

ERA: 2006-11 (SEASONS 32-36)

Seth Meyers steps up as head writer and gives free rein to Kristen Wiig, Bill Hader, Fred Armisen, Kenan Thompson, Andy Samberg, Jason Sudeikis, and more Forte.

- 10 - (R) Stefon (Hader)
- 9 - (P) MacGruber (Forte)
- 9 - (Q) Deep House Dish (Thompson)
- 8 - The Two A-holes (Wiig and Sudeikis)
- 7 - What Up With That? (Thompson)